

Is God a God of Risks?

Dan Todd | April 24, 2018

“Our God is a God of risks. God is ready to jeopardize His divine enterprise, to have me as His agent of transformation, so that the Kingdom of this world will become the Kingdom of God.”

I am not sure who made this statement originally. I have seen it attributed to Desmond Tutu, but could not find a source to confirm it. Either way, this appears to be a sentiment of many Christians. I have to confess that I know myself well enough that I often wonder why God would call me to ministry unless He was, indeed, a risk taker.

But does God take risks? Is He a gambler who is willing to accept a loss in order to achieve particular gains? Can God actually suffer loss?



Believers are called to be risk-takers

The dictionary defines risk as “exposure to the chance of injury or loss; a hazard or dangerous chance” (dictionary.com). As humans, we are obliged to take risks almost every day and to experience the changes and consequences that accompany our risks, sometimes resulting in benefits and sometimes in losses.

God calls us to be great risk takers in kingdom work – even to the point of dying if necessary.

The Apostle Paul wrote to his disciple, Timothy, “...all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” (2 Tim. 3:12)¹

Jesus gave warning to the multitudes who followed Him, “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:27) In other words, “He who is not willing to die for the kingdom of God should simply stay at home. There is no place for you among my disciples.”

In the last chapter of his gospel, John records a very personal and intimate conversation between Jesus and Peter. Maybe Jesus put a hand on each of Peter’s shoulders, looked him straight in the eyes, and said to him, “Peter, you are going to die as a result of feeding my sheep. You will suffer a very excruciating death for being my disciple. Now, gather up your things, follow me, and let’s get this journey started.” (John 21:18-19)

This was not an invitation, but a command. Salvation may gift us with eternal life, but the pathway of the disciple is replete with danger, includes persecution as a necessary ingredient, and may very likely end in a martyr's death.

In the Revelation, John recorded God's ultimate victory over Satan and the forces of evil, a victory gained by the blood of the Lamb and by the testimony of Christians who "loved not their lives even unto death." (Rev. 12:11)

Thus we see the Christian life fraught with risk along with its accompanying gains and losses.

Does God take risks?

Back to the original question: Does God take risks? Does He gamble as He carries out His eternal purpose by the hands of fallen men?

If there is one descriptor of God that is superior to all of His other characteristics, it may be that He is sovereign or Almighty. God is ruler over all beings and all Creation. He is in absolute control over every aspect of all things in heaven and on earth.

He cannot be injured, He cannot suffer loss, and He is never in danger of harm.

Job 42:2 "*I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted*" – meaning that no purpose of God can be "fenced in, walled up, or restrained."

Since this is true, God faces no risk in the accomplishment of His purposes.

Many other verses, such as Psalm 93:1, Dan. 4:35, Isaiah 46:10-11, Psalm 115:3 and Psalm 135:6 remind us of this same truth: God's purpose – that which gives Him pleasure – will always be accomplished.

Furthermore, God is omniscient or all-knowing.

1 John 3:20 "*God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.*"

Isaiah 46:9-10 "...*I am God, and there is none like me, declaring (or making known) the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done...*"

God did not just know how all things were going to end before they ever began. He determined how all things would end and how they would reach that end. Paul refers to this as God's "eternal purpose." (Eph. 3:11)

In its adjective form, the word "purpose" refers to that which is "fixed beforehand, predesigned."² (Complete Word Study Bible Dictionary or CWSB) God determined before Genesis how creation

would unfold and how the events of creation would impact eternity following the events of the Revelation.

God knows all things, and He has known all things from eternity. He is never surprised and holds no emergency councils to overcome barriers that would prevent the fulfillment of His will.

For any action or decision on the part of God to be defined as risky would imply an uncertain knowledge of the outcome of a situation, yet God knows all things – past, present, and future.

Other texts that confirm this same doctrine include Matt. 10:29-30, Psalm 139, Psalm 147:4-5, Prov. 15:3, 1 Chron. 28:9, and Heb. 4:13.

Thirdly, God is omnipotent or all powerful.

Any question of risk implies the possibility of failure as well as success. Therefore, the question “Does God take risks?” leads to another question, “Can God fail?”

If the answer to that question is yes, then there must be a power greater than God that is able to overcome God’s plans and to thwart His will, and, therefore, He is not omnipotent.

And if He is not omnipotent, then He is not sovereign, because He is not totally in control.

But if God is not omnipotent and not sovereign, then which part of the Universe is out of His control?

Some Christians believe that the part of the Universe that is outside of God’s control is the part He willfully conceded to man through the gift of free will. (That is a subject for a later blog entry. Stay tuned.)

In an address made at Marquette University in 2003, Archbishop Desmond Tutu made the following comment related to the relationship between the sovereignty of God and the free will of man.

God would show forth a profound reverence for our creaturely autonomy, our personal space. So that God would much rather we went freely to hell, than compel us to go to heaven. And whenever we made, or were about to make the wrong choice, God did not intervene except in a rejectable offer of grace to choose right. God could, only as it went, look on impotently and there was nothing that God could do to nullify our freedom. All God could do was to wait eagerly, expectantly, impotently, for the prodigal to return from the far country.³ (*Emphasis added*)

Here’s a question: If God is impotent to affect a person’s will in such a way that that person makes a decision for Christ, then why do we pray for lost people? If God cannot or will not interpose on a man’s free will, prayer for the lost would seem to be a useless proposition.

God cannot at one moment be impotent while maintaining His omnipotence. He cannot be all-powerful and powerless at the same moment. It's the argument of the immovable object and the irresistible force. The question is irrelevant because such circumstances cannot possibly exist in the Universe.

Can a man, through the application of his free will, prevent God from accomplishing His purposes? The prophet Daniel did not seem to think so.

Dan. 4:35 All the people of the earth are nothing compared to him. He does as he pleases among the angels of heaven and among the people of the earth. No one can stop him or say to him, "What do you mean by doing these things?"

A man through disobedience may rebel against the will of God or may even consider himself to have violated the will of God, but even so, because He is omniscient, God knew these things about this person before that person was ever conceived in the womb.

Ps. 139:3 You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. 4 Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. 15 My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. 16 Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them.

Conclusion

God is sovereign and omniscient and omnipotent; therefore, there is no element of risk in anything that He purposed to do.

Paul wrote in Romans 8:28 that those who are called to salvation are called "according to his (God's) purpose." He calls us on purpose for a purpose and that purpose will be accomplished. (Isaiah 46:11; Eph. 1:11)

2 Tim. 1:9 God saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began. (ESV)

When He calls men to salvation, there is no risk in the calling. He knew every moment of our lives from before our conception (Psalm 139:16) – from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). He knew when we would fail and when we would succeed – and the most amazing thing is that He called us anyway!

There is no risk with God, only purpose.

The end or primary reason for Christ's coming was not simply to call us to salvation and provide a way for us to escape the penalty of sin and death and hell.

He came to call us to service and to worship. (Eph. 1:11-12; 2:10)

He saved us because in our corruption and spiritual death, we were unable to do so. (Rom. 3:23)

That is the message of the gospel.

¹ Most of the time, when I am quoting the Bible or including a verse of Scripture, I will use the English Standard Version (ESV).

² One of my greatest resources is the [Complete Word Study Bible app](#). This is an app that works through the free Bible software from [www.olivetree.com](#) that you can download from Google Play. Or you can purchase the five-volume set from [christianbook.com](#) for about \$165.

³ From a [speech given at Marquette University](#).